United Nations A/60/PV.89

General Assembly

Sixtieth session

Official Records

89th plenary meeting
Thursday, 8 June 2006, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 4

Election of the President of the General Assembly

Election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session

The President: In accordance with rule 30 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, as amended by Assembly resolution 56/509 of 8 July 2002, I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session.

May I recall that, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138 of 19 December 1978, the President of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session should be elected from among the Asian States.

In that connection, I was informed by the Chairman of the Group of Asian States for the month of March 2006 that the Group has endorsed Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain for the presidency of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, and with the support of the Assembly, I therefore declare Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain elected by acclamation President of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to extend my warm congratulations to Her Excellency Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa and to welcome her to the General Assembly and to this splendid Hall today. Her election to the presidency of the General Assembly is a recognition of her impressive record of achievements and, I would add, her warm personality, as well as of the strong commitment of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the principles and purposes of the United Nations.

Let me express my deep appreciation of the presence at today's solemn occasion of the Foreign Minister of Bahrain, His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa.

The President-elect, Ambassador Al-Khalifa, brings a long and distinguished legal career, at both the national and the international levels, to the United Nations. She was one of the first two women lawyers to practice law in Bahrain. She has held many senior positions with leading legal organizations of the world, including with the International Bar Association. She is currently the Legal Adviser to the Royal Court in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Her pioneering role in the legal sphere has been coupled more recently with a prestigious diplomatic assignment. She served successfully as Bahrain's Ambassador to France as well as a permanent representative to UNESCO from 2000 to 2004.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-37920 (E)

Throughout her professional life, Ambassador Al-Khalifa has been a champion of women's rights in her society and in the court system. Here at the United Nations — and I am sure all present will agree — her election is a significant contribution to gender equality within the Organization and in the world. She will become only the third female President of the General Assembly and the first one since the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, in 1969.

Today's election marks the beginning of a three-month transition period. Just as my predecessor, President Ping, did — so ably — I am ready to support my successor in her preparations and ensure a smooth transition between the two presidencies. This goes especially for the ongoing reform processes and the two High-level Meetings, on migration and development and on the least developed countries, which will take place in the General Assembly at the beginning of the sixty-first session.

I warmly wish Ambassador Al-Khalifa the best of success in her new position. I welcome the fact that she is present in New York already, in early June, and ask all of you to extend your cooperation to her and to her Office during this important period of transition.

I now invite Her Excellency Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, who has just been elected President of the General Assembly for its sixty-first session, to take the floor.

Ms. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am delighted and honoured to have been elected President of the General Assembly for its sixty-first session. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to all member States, in particular the Asian Group, for their endorsement of my election and for the trust they have bestowed on me. My election to this high post is an honour for my country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, which has witnessed real and comprehensive political and economic reforms. Though small in size, Bahrain has registered tremendous achievements.

I will work with you all, in cooperation with you, to continue on the path that my colleagues, the presidents of the General Assembly at its previous sessions, have paved, in particular my colleague His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly at the current session. He has made great efforts to advance United Nations reform, and his achievements in the areas of international peace and security and of human rights are indeed noteworthy.

I cannot fail to commend the tireless efforts made by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, during his tenure, to promote the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to enhance respect for human dignity around the world. I commend the continuous manner in which he is working with Member States to liberate peoples from fear, want and disease, as well as to lay the foundations for the reform of the United Nations.

Allow me to congratulate you all on your efforts during this session, which were crowned by the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the creation of the Human Rights Council, affiliated with the General Assembly, and the strengthening of the Central Emergency Response Fund.

The United Nations today faces challenges in many parts of the world that threaten global security and that require collective efforts to confront and resolve them. It is my hope that, in consultation and in coordination with one another, we will be able to identify any shortcomings and develop a system based on effective multilateralism that can accomplish tangible results and serve our common interests, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Indeed, the United Nations is in need of continuous efforts on the part of us all to revitalize its main organs — hence reforming the Organization has become imperative if it is to achieve its objectives.

I look forward to working with you in pursuing the universal principles enshrined in the Charter. I will also be guided by the Kingdom of Bahrain's foreign policy, which is based on the rule of law, tolerance and respect for human rights and freedoms. We need to enhance the General Assembly's relationship with the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations organs. There is also a need to strengthen the partnership among the United Nations, regional organizations and civil society institutions. I will work with you to ensure that at its sixty-first session, the Assembly continues the process of United Nations reform that began a number of years ago.

I am moved by a deep feeling of pain caused by the tragedies occurring throughout the world at both the human and environmental levels. At the human level, the suffering caused by political disputes, wars, terrorism, poverty and malnutrition motivates me; at the environmental level, pollution, global warming, the

depletion of natural resources and the increase in the rate of extinction of living species compel me to try to make a difference.

In that context, I have not forgotten the many instances of women being harshly treated, in some parts of the world — instances of suppression and human indignities. Those memories indicate that the suffering experienced by women as a result of injustices motivate me to work with you to find appropriate solutions to alleviate their pain and to uphold the principles of the Charter, which emphasizes full respect for all humans without discrimination.

I am further motivated by our need to identify and communicate with one another so as to develop a common understanding. It is inconceivable to me how information technology can have advanced to such an incredible degree and yet we still have such difficulty communicating with one another. Indeed, over the past few years the Internet has made a reality of the notion of the universal library, which a few decades ago was merely a figment of the imagination of the noted Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges. That attests to the role that advanced information technology can play in bringing human beings closer to one another.

Thus, if we reflect upon all the miseries and tragedies suffered by humanity throughout the twentieth century and to the present day, we realize that they not only harm humanity, but also distort the meaning of creativity, art and beauty, leaving a disastrous imprint on reality and on our lives. In fact, the future of coming generations depends on the way in which we address current problems. We must work to preserve humanitarianism and to ensure that our planet is a safer and more suitable place in which to live. Essentially, we are all human beings who share a common fate, and that is what inspired the founders of our Organization.

Thus it is crucial that we find a comprehensive and practical strategy to combat one of the greatest evils of our time: terrorism. Is it possible to achieve this without addressing the problems of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and extremism in all its forms? Is it possible to achieve this without examining educational curricula that give rise to terrorist ideologies and to exclusion? It is time that we focus on the importance of education in nurturing future generations and foster curricula that promote openness, critical thinking and creativity.

Is this not what we, the peoples of the United Nations, seek to achieve: a clear, pragmatic vision that will put an end to the ongoing violations of human freedoms? We are aware that the majority of the world's people live with hunger, disease, illiteracy, war and internal and international displacement. Yet we should not lose hope, for I believe that great hope arises from great hardships.

In conclusion, I cannot fail to reaffirm my commitment to work with you during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly to attain the objectives set out in the United Nations Charter, within a framework of transparency and full respect for all views and positions.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, President-elect of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, for her important, thoughtful and forward-looking statement stressing the need for us to live in a world of hope rather than in a world of fear. There will be an opportunity to extend congratulations to the President-elect in the Indonesian Lounge after the adjournment of this meeting.

I now give the floor to regional representatives.

I call on the representative of Zimbabwe, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Chidyausiku (Zimbabwe): Allow me, on behalf of the Group of African States, to congratulate Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Sheikha Al-Khalifa brings with her a wealth of diplomatic experience. We are confident that under her able leadership and guidance, we will have a fruitful sixty-first session.

The African Group is particularly pleased at this election, as it has brought a breath of fresh air to the General Assembly. Sheikha Al-Khalifa becomes only the third woman President of the General Assembly since 1946, and we welcome her election as a demonstration of our collective commitment to gender equality.

The agenda of the sixty-first session will be challenging and exciting as we continue to grapple with the unfinished business of reform. As we begin to see the outcome of that effort and to assess its conformity with the expressed aspirations of the majority of the United Nations membership, we will

rely on the new President's leadership. While the task before Sheikha Al-Khalifa will not be easy, let me assure her, through you, Mr. President, that she can count on the support of the African Group in her efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): It is an honour to express, on behalf of the Group of Asian States, our heartfelt congratulations to Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, former Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to France and currently representative of the Kingdom of Bahrain at the International Chamber of Commerce Court of Arbitration in Paris, on her election to the high office of President of the General Assembly for its sixty-first session.

Her deep knowledge, impressive experience and wide professional achievements in the fields of law and diplomacy will, without doubt, prove to be of great value and will be an asset in guiding member States through the important and complex issues before them, while maintaining our momentum towards reforming the Organization.

It is also significant that we have today elected the third woman President of the General Assembly, a step in the right direction towards bridging the wide gender-equality gap that has characterized the presidency of this body.

I would like to assure the President-elect that the Asian Group will render active support and cooperation as she discharges the responsibilities of her high office.

Our group would also like to express its deep appreciation and profound gratitude to the President, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson of Sweden, for his extraordinary commitment and able guidance in fulfilling his duties as President of the Assembly at its sixtieth session. His skill, leadership and dedication have been essential for the achievement of the successful outcome of the session during one of the Assembly's most crucial periods.

As a result of his strong determination and perseverance, fundamental changes have, indeed, taken place under his presidency. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council are just two of the significant steps that instantly spring to mind. Again, we thank Mr. Eliasson for his outstanding presidency and wish him all the best in his important position as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. At the same time, we extend our warmest welcome to Her Excellency Ms. Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa as the next President of the General Assembly, and look forward to working closely with her.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Albania, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Neritani (Albania): I have the honour to convey, on behalf of the States members of the Eastern European Group, our most sincere congratulations to Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain on her election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa will take up her post at a time when the United Nations is at a critical juncture in its history. We are confident that her distinguished career, together with her extensive legal background, will further contribute to the advancement of the ongoing process of the reform of the Organization as a whole and that she will guide us through the important tasks of the General Assembly at its next session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our high appreciation and profound gratitude to the outgoing President, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for the commitment and strong determination that he demonstrated during the sixtieth session. This extensive, wise and vigorous leadership has been very important and made a significant contribution to the achievements that we all witnessed during his outstanding presidency.

Members of the Eastern European Group, in the spirit of cooperation with other groups, will go the extra mile to carry forward the ongoing reform process of the Organization. We assure the newly elected President of the long-lasting support of our Group in continuing to work in the same direction during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, with the ultimate aim of contributing to and creating a more effective and efficient Organization.

The President: I thank the representative of Albania for the strong commitment of the Eastern European States to continue the reform process.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my honour and pleasure, on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to warmly congratulate Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the General Assembly for its sixty-first session. We are familiar with the Kingdom of Bahrain's commitment to multilateralism and to the Charter, and we are aware of Ambassador Al-Khalifa's broad experience at the international level, particularly with regard to international law. We are certain that that experience will prove very useful as she carries out the complex tasks that await her during the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

It is a source of particular satisfaction for us that the President of the Assembly will be a woman — and one who has such an impressive history of defending the rights of women. We would like to express the readiness of the States members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group to cooperate as constructively as possible with her to ensure the success of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Ireland, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Cooney (Ireland): I would like, in my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States, to warmly congratulate Her Excellency Ambassador Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain on her election as President of the General Assembly for its sixty-first session. Ambassador Al-Khalifa's election is not just a personal honour, but a demonstration of the high esteem in which the Kingdom of Bahrain is held by the United Nations. It also marks a significant step towards gender equality in this Organization.

Ambassador Al-Khalifa will assume the presidency at a time when the United Nations is facing many challenges. We in the General Assembly are fortunate that we will be able to call on the considerable skills and experience accumulated by Ambassador Al-Khalifa during her distinguished career as a lawyer, diplomat and tireless advocate for the empowerment of women.

I would like to assure Ambassador Al-Khalifa that she can rely on the fullest support of the Group of Western European and other States in carrying out her high responsibilities.

It is customary on this occasion to thank the President in office of the General Assembly for his or her stewardship during the current session. No President could have been more deserving of our appreciation than you, Sir. Your personal leadership has been essential in securing the significant achievements which have already marked the sixtieth session. We know and expect that, during the three months which remain of your term of office, you will be urging us to make further progress. We look forward to working with you in this common endeavour so that when Ambassador Al-Khalifa assumes the presidency of the General Assembly in September, we can address the future of the United Nations in confidence and unity.

The President: I thank Ambassador Cooney for his prognosis that member States will be expected to deliver in the next three months.

I give the floor to the representative of Algeria, who will speak on behalf of the Arab Group.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Arab Group in New York, it is my distinct pleasure to express our warmest congratulations to Her Excellency Shaikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa on her election as President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. This choice by the member States is a source of pride for Bahrain and for each and every member of the Arab Group in New York, as well as for all women, particularly Arab women.

I should like to assure Ms. Al-Khalifa of the fullest cooperation of the Arab Group and to wish her every success in her endeavours.

The President: I wish once again to congratulate the President-elect and the Government of Bahrain, represented by their eminent Foreign Minister. The President-elect will have the full support of the General Assembly, and the best possible cooperation. I am very glad to feel this sense of unity in this Hall with respect to your upcoming presidency.

Programme of work

The President: May I remind representatives that consecutive meetings of the Special Political and

Decolonization Committee and of the Second, Third and Sixth Committees for the election of their Chairpersons and other officers of their bureaux will follow immediately after the adjournment of this meeting. Thereafter, the Assembly will hold its 90th plenary meeting to elect the 21 Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for the sixty-first session.

I wish to inform members that the election of the Chairpersons and other officers of the bureaux of the First Committee and the Fifth Committee has been postponed to a later date to allow time for the necessary consultations among the regional groups.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.